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U. S. Policy Change Creates Vague Role For Ambassador

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Special to the Staff Writer

WASHINGTON, Dec. 14 --

What has happened to Henry Cabot Lodge, the U. S. ambassador in Saigon?

From the distance he seems to have moved into obscurity.

This has coincided with a drastic change of emphasis in U.S.

Mr. Lodge's policy -- from the earlier view that a military solution was not possible to the view now that it may be the only solution.

The military men in Vietnam dominate the scene, just as they do in Washington--a contrast to the days of Mr. Lodge's first tour as ambassador to Vietnam when he dominated every aspect of the American operation there.

Falls Into 'Silence'

In recent weeks Mr. Lodge has appeared at a bombed U.S. billet to denounce the bombing as an outrage and has promised the investigate the alleged U.S. desecration of a Buddhist temple. Otherwise, he has been more or less silent.

In recent months, Mr. Lodge was one of the most articulate members of a U.S. policy team put major emphasis on these points:

There can be no military solution in Vietnam.

Vietnam is primarily a political problem.

The military problem is primarily a Vietnamese problem; the U.S. can help, but it is a Vietnamese war and they must win it or lose it. Mr. Lodge preached and practiced this approach to Vietnam during his first tour as ambassador in Saigon under the late President John F. Kennedy. And he preached it here last spring and summer as he prepared to return to Saigon as ambassador for the second time.

Lansdale 'Them' Too

Mr. Lodge even took with him on his latest mission to Saigon a controversial but strong-willed man who long has been convinced that application of superior military force alone never will force the Communists in Vietnam to quit.

It is the Force Maj. Gen. William H. Tunnicliffe (Ret). He believes that air strikes, artillery and big conventional military operations--all activities in which the U. S. is increasingly engaged--will boomarang and drive the people into the arms of the Viet Cong.

Little has been heard about either Mr. Lodge or General Tunnicliffe--or their ideas of joint political-military action--since they returned to Vietnam last summer.

The contrast with Mr. Lodge's first tour of duty in 1963-64 is great--just as the change in U. S. Policy since early 1965 has been great.

No. 1 On First Tour

Mr. Lodge arrived in Saigon the first time during the closing days of the Diem regime when the differences among members of the American mission--and between various civilian and military missions--were as great as those that divided the Vietnamese themselves.

Mr. Lodge became the No. 1 American who brooked no interference with his views. He assumed absolute control, even over the U.S. military operation which then was under the ineffective Gen. Paul Harkins. He had the

He confided nothing to the regular Embassy staff and brought with him two special assistants who talked only to Mr. Lodge.

Mr. Lodge talked only to Washington, preferably only to the White House.

President Johnson's decision to change U.S. policy obviously has changed Mr. Lodge's influence. The U.S. decision to escalate the war and vastly increase U.S. military participation -- a decision answered by the Communists with escalation by the North Vietnamese--was made before Mr. Lodge went back to Vietnam.

So, presumably, he was aware of the new direction of American activities in Vietnam when he agreed to go back.

There has been a similar decline in the role of Washington civilians in Vietnam. Secretary of State Dean Rusk has been to Vietnam only twice in five years.